

I REFUSED TO TALK TO  
PRESIDENT LINCOLN

BY

MATTHEW BOWKER

I enlisted originally in Co. F 48 Indiana and with the Captain's nephew Charles Ruple went out for a little lark. We were arrested by the sergeant as deserters and I was put in the guard house but the Captain's nephew was returned to his company. We had absolutely no intention of deserting but the sergeant would not listen to me. While I was in the guard house some confederate prisoners were taken and were put in the guard house with me and in spite of my protestations I was taken along with them as a confederate prisoner first to Columbus, Ohio and later on to Fort Delaware in Delaware Bay, and kept with them. I did my best to convince the officers in charge that I was not a confederate prisoner but they only laughed at me and said "That sort of chin music won't work." I finally had to enlist in Battery M 3 Pa. Vols., to keep from being exchanged to the confederates as one of their soldiers.

While in this service I was detailed to the gun boat Flora Temple and when that boat was destroyed I was detailed to the gun boat Chamberlain, being an old sailor. Admiral Porter had a fleet of gun boats on the Dutch Gap Canal and the gun boat Chamberlain took President Lincoln up the James River to visit Admiral Porter. I was at the wheel and President Lincoln came to me and tried to converse but I would not answer as I was at the wheel and it is the custom of the sea for the man at the wheel not to speak to anyone except the officer of the deck or the officer in charge. President Lincoln went to the Commodore, Brigadier General Graham and explained that I would not speak to him and then the Commodore came to me and told me to answer any of the President's questions. I did so and in the course of the conversation related all of the incidents above set forth. He then wrote me in his

own handwriting a pardon for the desertion and gave it to me. I have since lost this paper and at the same time I lost his pardon I also lost five honorable discharges, four of which were discharges from enlistments as Indian Scout.

Matthew Bowker, Cheyenne Indian Agency, Wyoming, June 17, 1916.

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Matthew Bowker was born at Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England, December 30, 1842 and died at Cheyenne Agency, Wyoming, October 18, 1919, leaving twelve half breed children and a widow who soon remarried.

For his desertion this man was sentenced by General Order 37, Department of the Tennessee, to be confined in the penitentiary at Alton, Ill., for the remainder of his term of service and he may have voluntarily mixed himself up with some confederate prisoners to escape the penitentiary.

The court martial record shows that Bowker was found secreted in an ice box on the steamer General Anderson at Fort Pemberton on the Tallahatchie River March 27, 1863, just before the steamer left for Helena, Ark., or some point further up the Mississippi River.

This man's detail to the Flora Temple is shown by War Department records and while all old soldiers and sailors are more or less romancers, his statement as to his refusal to talk to President Lincoln probably June 22, 1864, is regarded as trustworthy.

In any event Bowker does not claim that Lincoln was a Christian.

